

ESDN Policy Brief 6

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Recommendations for Parliamentary Involvement in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda

Introduction

The 2030 Agenda, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is an all-encompassing agenda for the whole world. It has been adopted by the 193 countries of the United Nations General Assembly and every country has to contribute to achieving them, both at home and abroad. While the main mandate for implementation lies with governments, **parliaments play a crucial role**. They do not only put pressure on the government and hold it accountable, they also draft and approve legislation, are involved in the budgetary process and involve stakeholders and citizens. This ESDN Policy Brief examines how parliaments in Europe can be more effectively involved in SDG implementation. **It is based on a survey of 25 parliaments in Europe**, as well as the **presentations and discussions at the 19th ESDN Workshop**, which had **over 100 participants**, including **many parliamentarians, policymakers, and sustainable development experts from over 15 countries**.

The European Sustainable Development Network

The ESDN is a non-profit, pan-European peer-learning, networking, knowledge, and advocacy platform for sustainability professionals in the public sector working in collaboration with other organisations and institutions dealing with sustainable development issues. It is based on the transparent and trustful cooperation of these actors. It collects, compiles and shares information on sustainability policies, strategies and practises, and provides expertise to political decision-makers at European, national and sub-national levels. The ESDN also fosters sustainable development through active communication and continued cooperation with other stakeholders and civil society.

Questions on Parliamentary Involvement in SDG Implementation

- 1) What different mechanisms and tools can parliamentarians make use of to engage with the 2030 Agenda?
- 2) What are the challenges that inhibit effective involvement?
- 3) What do different forms of effective involvement look like?

Policy Recommendations

- 1) Find an effective structure that works for your parliament
- 2) Assess where you stand, and monitor and measure progress
- 3) Raise awareness and create political will
- 4) Overcome silos
- 5) Involve all stakeholders

1) Find an effective structure that works for your parliament

In many parliaments, there is either a (sub-) committee for sustainable development, or sustainable development has been assigned to a specific committee, often to the committee for environment, for foreign affairs, for development, or, as in the case of Finland, Committee for the Future. However, not all parliamentarians find it useful to have a specific committee working on SD, as this risks putting sustainable development into a silo. Yet, there are many advantages of forming a committee. **It creates a focal point for SDG implementation in the parliament.**

It can be helpful for all parliamentarians to know where they can ask for advice and information. It can also be a point of contact in the parliament for other stakeholders and the government. However, it is important that this committee is not the only one that works on the implementation of sustainable development. Rather, **this committee can ensure that the principles of sustainable development are integrated into the work of all parliamentarians and committees.**

Alternatively, some parliamentarians have formed **informal groups**. For example, the All-Party Group in the Danish Parliament consists of members of all parties represented in the Parliament. Similarly, a group of Austrian parliamentarians from different parties is working together on strengthening implementation in Austria.

Example: The Danish informal All-Party Group

This group was initiated by one motivated parliamentarian and had mobilised one-third of parliamentarians by June 2021. It has formed connection to all standing committees. It also connects with civil society and has initiated the 2030-Panel, a multi-stakeholder advisory body on sustainable development.

2) Assess where you stand, and monitor and measure progress

In order to start working on the SDGs, it can be useful to assess the status quo of SDG achievement in the country (if such a report has not already been done) and **gain an overview of the tools that the parliament already has at its disposal.**

Two useful tools for measuring progress and informing parliament's work are **the national statistics office and, in particular, the supreme audit institution**. Reports and assessments by these institutions can be very helpful to **pressure the government to take more action**, or, in the case of Austria, to include the Parliament more in SDG implementation. In addition, they can help to assess the potential for synergies.

Once a basis for parliamentary involvement is created, it is also important to **monitor the government's activity, especially the budget and new legislative proposals**. Even if the government already conducts an impact assessment, the parliament can conduct its own, more holistic, assessment if it deems it necessary. Here, there is high potential for synergies, too. Many parliaments already assess human rights or social and environmental impacts. A holistic impact assessment that includes all these aspects in addition to other SDG indicators could be most efficient.

Example: The Austrian Court of Auditors

The Austrian Federal Court of Auditors has found in a recent report that the Parliament needs to be involved more in SDG implementation. This has evoked a response and commitment from the government. The Austrian Parliament can also request studies from the Court of Auditors.

3) Raise awareness and create political will

Parliamentarians and stakeholders from different countries agreed during the Workshop that there is still a lack of awareness of and misinformation about the SDGs among their colleagues. Often, it is seen as an issue that only concerns the field of development cooperation or the environment. In a first step towards creating political will, **there needs to be an information campaign about the SDGs**. This could, for example, take the shape of a mini-expo, where civil society actors are invited into the parliament to interact with parliamentarians about the SDGs. In addition, **members of the SD committee or dedicated parliamentarians could visit the other standing committees of the parliament and inform their members about the SDGs and how their specific field of expertise can contribute to their achievement**. This will also help in overcoming silo-thinking.

Initiatives that come from inside the parliament are usually the most effective, as they create a feeling of ownership with the parliamentarians, like the National Sustainable Development Council in Hungary or the Danish 2030 Panel. Therefore, it is important to convince parliamentarians that it is a worthy cause and it will bring benefits. Similarly, another crucial point that was highlighted during the Workshop is the **need for political leadership**. Even if the institutions in place are conducive to sustainable development, if parliamentarians or the government are not willing to commit to sustainable development, the laws and the budget will reflect that.

Therefore, it is important to **create political will through positive communication about the SDGs and their potential in innovative and positive ways**. It is important to highlight the many opportunities for synergies both in policies for implementation as well as in the outcomes.

Example: The Dutch Adopt an SDG Campaign

When participating in the Adopt an SDG Campaign, parliamentarians adopt one or two SDGs that are most relevant to their work. In a video they answer questions on how they will integrate the SDGs into their work and the Dutch media and civil society can follow their activities.

4) Overcome silos

Sustainable development is always in danger of being put into the silo of environmental or development cooperation issues. In addition, while implementing sustainable development, it is important to **ensure that different actors in different thematic fields or institutions cooperate**.

Therefore, the parliamentarians dedicated to SD need to communicate to their colleagues with different fields of expertise. Explaining the potential of their expertise to contributing towards achieving the SDGs will help motivate them. It will also show the interlinkages with other fields. Some countries have successfully conducted joint committee hearings to synergise and cooperate on certain issues.

Example: The Hungarian National Council for Sustainable Development (NFFT)

The NFFT, which was initiated by Members of Parliament, is designed as an advisory and interest reconciliation body. Its members represent the Academy of Science, churches, local governments and ethnic minorities, as well as Members of Parliament and representatives of several ministries. The NFFT's tasks include defining the principles, objectives and tasks of SD in Hungary. In addition, it promotes and supervises implementation.

5) Involve all stakeholders

In addition to thematic silos, there are institutional silos between parliament, the government and other stakeholders, including those from civil society. **It is important to establish a continuous dialogue between all actors in order to ensure efficient cooperation.** A singular event can serve as a kick-off for cooperation, but should be followed by a **more institutionalised dialogue**. One way of institutionalising cooperation with multiple actors is to **create a multi-stakeholder council**. This can involve both parliament and government, as well as representatives from civil society, academia, the business sector and religious groups. Multi-stakeholder councils can take on all kinds of roles and tasks. Thanks to its diverse members, a multi-stakeholder council would help to include multiple perspectives into SDG implementation and make sure that different layers of society have their voices heard.

Example: SDG Watch Austria's Involvement in the VNR

SDG Watch Austria contributed to Austria's first VNR. It was a first experience of constant and institutionalised dialogue. As a result, SDG Watch Austria formulated several demands for the Austrian Parliament, such as ensuring that the constituents' voices are heard in the implementation process to develop a mechanism to institutionalise the implementation of the SDGs in Parliament.

Summary

It is important to note, that the structures in every parliament are different. This includes, for example, the freedom that committees have to choose their own subjects, how interaction between the government and parliaments works and how the parliament can interact with other institutions, such as the supreme audit institution or the national statistics office. This is why the first recommendation, **find a structure that works for your parliament**, is a key consideration and has to be kept in mind when working in, or with, parliaments.

In order to get started, it is important to **assess where you stand**. This not only includes a gap analysis of SDG progress in the country, which can help convince the government and other parliamentarians to take more action, but also means that parliaments take stock of the instruments they have available in their specific national structure and determine how, and if, they can be used for SDG implementation.

In addition, it is important to **monitor progress and assess the impacts of all actions** by the parliament and the government. This is important to ensure that parliamentary actions are streamlined towards SDG implementation and different committees do not inhibit each other's work.

Inarguably, **raising awareness and creating political will** is important in any kind of (parliamentary) setting or structure. Without enthusiastic and dedicated people, the best set-up and committees will not achieve their goals.

For effective implementation, **overcoming silos and involving stakeholders** is crucial. Sustainable development needs an inclusive, all-of-society approach. In the parliamentary context, this means that different committees need to work together, to weigh up trade-offs and capitalise on synergies. As representatives of the citizens of a country, parliaments have a duty to make the voices of their constituents heard, especially when it comes to SDG implementation.

This Policy Brief is based on a survey sent out through the European Centre for Research and Documentation as well as discussions at the 19th ESDN Workshop. For a more detailed discussion of the survey results and discussions, please refer to the [ESDN Report](#) on Parliamentary Mechanisms in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda.